CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A system for automated interactive management of a communication service account, said account having parameters establishing rules of use based on the time during which a user device accesses the communication service, comprising:

a server; and

a data storage device in communication with the server, the data storage device comprising account data that comprises the parameters,

wherein the server is configured to receive a customer-initiated signal requesting modification of a first account parameter and to modify the first account parameter in response to the customer-initiated signal.

2. The system of claim 1 wherein the communication service is wireless telephone service, the user device is a wireless telephone, the customer-initiated signal is initiated on the user device, and the first account parameter is a number of calling plan minutes.

3. The system of claim 1 wherein the communication service is wireless telephone service, the user device is a wireless telephone, the customer-initiated signal is initiated on a device that is not the user device, and the first account parameter is a number of calling plan minutes.

4. The system of claim 3 wherein the customer-initiated signal is initiated on a personal computer.

5. The system of claim 1 wherein the communication service is long distance telephone service, the user device is a telephone, the customer-initiated signal is initiated on the user device, and the first account parameter is a number of calling plan minutes.

6. The system of claim 1 wherein the communication service is long distance telephone service, the user device is a telephone, the customer-initiated signal is initiated on a device that is not the user device, and the first account parameter is a number of calling plan minutes.

7. The system of claim 6 wherein the customer-initiated signal is initiated on a personal computer.

8. The system of claim 1 wherein the communication service shares a communication medium with cable television transmission and the user device is one of a personal computer, a set top box, an interactive television, and a VoIP telephone.

9. The system of claim 1 wherein the server is further configured

to receive a customer-initiated identifying signal identifying the user device,

to retrieve the first account parameter in response to the identifying signal, and

to issue, in response to the identifying signal and for communication to the customer, a response signal comprising at least part of the first account parameter.

10. The system of claim 9 wherein the server is further configured

to identify the type of user device, and

to issue the response signal in a form optimized for the user device.

11. The system of claim 10 wherein the communication service is wireless telephone service, the user device is a wireless telephone, and the first account parameter comprises a number of calling plan minutes.

12. The system of claim 10 wherein the communication service is long distance telephone service, the user device is a telephone, and the first account parameter comprises a number of calling plan minutes.

13. The system of claim 10 wherein the communication service shares a communication medium with cable television transmission and the user device is one of a personal computer, a set top box, an interactive television, and a VoIP telephone.

14. The system of claim 10 wherein the server is further configured to update the first account parameter based upon use of the communication service by the user device, and the server is further configured to, upon the first account parameter reaching a first

predetermined value, automatically reset the first account parameter to a second predetermined value.

15. The system of claim 14 wherein the communication service is wireless telephone service, the user device is a wireless telephone, the first account parameter is a number of calling plan minutes, the server is configured to update the number of calling plan minutes based upon the user device placing wireless telephone calls, the first predetermined value is a minimum calling plan minute threshold, and the second predetermined value is larger than the first predetermined value.

16. The system of claim 14 wherein the server is further configured, upon receipt of a customer-initiated cancellation signal, to not automatically reset the first account parameter to a second predetermined value.

17. An automated method of managing communication service accounts, comprising:

maintaining a database comprising account parameters, wherein at least one account parameter establishes rules by which a customer's user device may use the communication service at designated times;

receiving a customer-initiated signal requesting modification of the at least one account parameter;

modifying the at least one account parameter in response to the customer-initiated signal; and

updating the database to reflect modification of the at least one account parameter.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein the communication service is wireless telephone service, the user device is a wireless telephone, the first account parameter comprises a preset amount of service usage time during a first period, and the first account parameter is modified to decrease the preset amount of service usage time during the first period and increase a preset amount of service usage time during a second period.

19. The method of claim 17 wherein the communication service is long distance telephone service, the user device is a telephone, the first account parameter comprises a preset amount of service usage time during a first period, and the first account parameter is modified to decrease the preset amount of service usage time during the first period and increase a preset amount of service usage time during a second period.

20. The method of claim 17 wherein the communication service shares a communication medium with cable television transmission, the user device is one of a personal computer, a set top box, an interactive television, and a VoIP telephone, the first account parameter comprises a preset amount of service usage time during a first period, and the first account parameter is modified to decrease the preset amount of service usage time

during the first period and increase a preset amount of service usage time during a second period.

21. The method of claim 17 further comprising the steps of

receiving a customer-initiated identifying signal identifying the user device;

retrieving at least one account parameter in response to the identifying signal;

issuing, in response to the identifying signal and for communication to the user device, a response signal comprising at least part of the retrieved account parameter; and

querying whether an account modification is desired.

22. The method of claim 21 wherein the communication service is wireless telephone service, the user device is a wireless telephone, and the retrieved account parameter comprises a number of calling plan minutes.

23. The method of claim 21 wherein the communication service is long distance telephone service, the user device is a telephone, and the retrieved account parameter comprises a number of calling plan minutes.

24. The method of claim 21 wherein the communication service shares a communication medium with cable television transmission and the user device is one of a personal computer, a set top box, an interactive television, and a VoIP telephone.

25. An automated method of managing communication service accounts for at least two types of communication service, comprising:

maintaining a first database comprising account parameters, wherein a first account parameter establishes rules by which a first type communication service may be accessed at designated times;

maintaining a second database comprising account parameters, wherein a second account parameter establishes rules by which a second type communication service may be accessed at designated times;

receiving a customer-initiated signal requesting modification of at least one of the first and second account parameters;

modifying, in response to the customer-initiated signal, the first parameter to change a preset amount of first service usage time during a first period;

modifying, in response to the customer-initiated signal, the second parameter to change a preset amount of second service usage time during a second period; and

updating at least one of the first and second databases to reflect modification of the first and second account parameters.

26. The method of claim 25 wherein the first and second databases are part of a single database.

27. A system for automated interactive management of a communication service account, comprising:

a server; and

a data storage device in communication with the server, the data storage device comprising account data that establish account parameters controlling the terms by which a plurality of user devices may obtain communication service,

wherein the server is configured

to update a first account parameter based on use of the communication service by the plurality of user devices

to receive a customer-initiated signal requesting modification of the first account parameter,

to query the database and determine if the first account parameter is a modifiable account parameter that may be modified in response to a customer-initiated signal, and

to modify the first account parameter if it is a modifiable account parameter.

28. The system of claim 27 wherein the communication service is wireless telephone service, the plurality of user devices comprises a group of wireless telephones, the first account parameter comprises a set of calling plan minutes from which each of the plurality of user devices may draw, and the customer-initiated signal comprises a group administrator access code.